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# Articles in Today's Clips

**Tuesday, October 7, 2008**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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The Macomb Daily (macombdaily.com), Serving Macomb County

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News

## Mother seeks 'victim' rights

### Abused teen's mom sues prosecutor's office, aiming to get help in criminal case

Monday, October 6, 2008 6:39 AM EDT

By Norb Franz, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

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The mother of a teenage girl who allegedly was sexually assaulted by a relative wants to force prosecutors to consider the mom a "victim" in the criminal case.

The Michigan Crime Victim's Rights Act extends that designation to parents or legal guardians on behalf of minors victimized by crime. In the case of the 13-year-old girl, that entitlement currently is held by a social worker, as her victim "advocate," because the teen's mother does not have legal custody of her daughter while the girl is in foster care.

The Macomb Daily currently is not publishing the names of the mother or the teen because the newspaper generally does not directly identify victims of alleged sexual assaults.

In a lawsuit filed against the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office, the woman has asked a judge to order Prosecutor Eric Smith to designate her as the "victim"—instead of the state Department of Human Services. The move would give the mother a say in the criminal case against the relative, particularly if prosecutors discuss a plea bargain.

"Ever since the girl was taken

away, we don't know what's happening with her," said Timothy Barkovic, the attorney representing the woman.

"We just want to be in the loop. There's no better person to make those judgments than a natural mother."

James Langtry, chief of operations for Macomb operations, declined to comment for this report.

The case is assigned to Macomb Circuit Judge Matthew Switalski.

According to Barkovic, his client suffered injuries in a "horrendous" auto accident that left her physically and mentally incapable of raising her child, and agreed to temporary custody with her sister-in-law. During that time, the teen was raped by her cousin with whom she resided, and Macomb County Child Protective Services removed her from the home in St. Clair Shores, Barkovic said.

The girl later attempted suicide and shoplifted, according to the lawsuit.

Barkovic said the mother is battling to regain custody of her daughter. The woman's husband is in prison, and she is now physically capable of caring for her daughter, he said.

The man accused of molesting the teen, Brandon McBurney, 18, of St. Clair Shores, is charged with eight counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, and one count of second-degree criminal sexual conduct. His trial is scheduled for Nov. 18 before Circuit Judge Diane Druzinski.

The girl was 12 years old at the time of the alleged assaults.

St. Clair Shores Detective Joe Heythaler, the officer in charge of the police case, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

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## Ex-Port Huron man gets life in toddler son's death

10/6/2008, 3:54 p.m. ET

**The Associated Press**

PORT HURON, Mich. (AP) — A former Port Huron man has been sentenced to life in prison for killing his 18-month-old son.

St. Clair County Circuit Judge Peter Deegan on Monday sentenced 39-year-old John William Gonzales to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

A jury convicted him in August of felony murder and first-degree child abuse.

Police say Gonzales and Ashley Marie Snowden lived in Port Huron when their son Braylon Bishop Gonzales died in 2005. They later moved to Fort Wayne, Ind., and Braylon's body was found stuffed in a storage container in their old house.

Snowden pleaded guilty in May to being an accessory after the fact. She was sentenced to seven to 15 years in prison.

A message seeking comment was left for defense attorney Sharon Parrish.

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October 7, 2008

## **STATEWIDE: Sides in class-action to make sure foster-care deal is fair**

A lawsuit against Michigan on behalf of 19,000 foster care children is to have its settlement-fairness hearing at 10 a.m. Tuesday at the U.S. District Court in Detroit.

The hearing is to allow both sides of the class-action to discuss settlement concerns.

Children's Rights, an advocacy group from New York, filed the lawsuit against the state in 2006, alleging that mismanagement within the Department of Human Services created dangerous conditions for the thousands of children in state custody.

The settlement includes improving investigations of abuse and neglect, and hiring more caseworkers.

## New Michigan food stamp rules benefit working families

<http://www.blogsmonroe.com/budget/?p=2832>

New food stamp rules took effect Oct. 1 in Michigan that could result in an increase in **food stamp benefits** - particularly for working families who have low income but high child care bills.

The Center for Civil Justice in Saginaw reports that the changes include a huge change in how child care expenses are counted in the formula. Previously, only \$200 a month for children younger than age 2, and \$175 for children age 2 and older would be counted. Now ALL of the documented paid child care will be deducted from family's income, the agency reports.

"Families who were told their income was too high - even though much of it was going to child care - might now be able to qualify for the first time," said Demetrice Smart, project coordinator for the Food and Nutrition Helpline operated by the Center for Civil Justice.

The agency also suggests that current food stamp families who have high child care expenses submit copies of their child care bills to their caseworker as soon as possible so their benefits can be reviewed.

There will also be an overall cost-of-living adjustment and increase of the federal minimum allotment in the food stamp program taking effect this month.

The Center for Civil Justice operates the Michigan Food and Nutrition Helpline in partnership with the Michigan State University Extension's Food and Nutrition Program, the **Michigan Department of Human Services** and private donors.

You'll find more details and a benefits estimate calculator at [www.foodstamphelp.org](http://www.foodstamphelp.org). There is also a **Michigan Assistance and Referral Service** on-line database that will help you determine which state programs you qualify for. DHS has a page that explains what you can expect during the **client application process**. And the Michigan Food Stamp hotline is at (800) 481-4989.

If you are getting confused trying to navigate the state on-line information, but think you might be eligible for food stamps or would like more information, the Monroe County Department of Human Services office is at 903 S. Telegraph Rd., Suite A, in Monroe. The phone number is 243-7200. The office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, except for state holidays.

Now, how do you make those food stamp dollars stretch as much as possible? Check out the resources I have listed in my **grocery shopping sidebar**. You'll learn tricks on coupon clipping, find recipes that rely on frugal food purchases and get help with planning a home cooking menu.


And here are other notes of interest to Michigan Bridge Card users:

- You can use food stamps / Bridge Card to purchase groceries from **Angel Food Ministries**, which has monthly delivery stops in Monroe and Lambertville.
- You can use your Bridge Card to get a **discounted yearly pass** to Michigan state parks such as Sterling State Park in Frenchtown Township.
- A Bridge Card means your school children are **automatically eligible** for free lunches at school.

October 7, 2008

# **Power Cutoffs Soar As Americans Struggle To Pay Bills**

[www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)

[MICHAEL HILL](#) | October 6, 2008 02:36 PM EST | 

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COHOES, N.Y. — The number of Americans whose electricity or gas has been shut off for nonpayment of their bills is up sharply in many parts of the country as people struggle to cope with higher prices and a shaky economy.

Shut-offs have been running 17 percent higher than last year among customers of New York state's major utilities, and 22 percent higher in economically hard-hit Michigan. They are up in all or part of dozens of other states, including Pennsylvania, Florida and California, according to an [Associated Press](#) check of regulators and energy companies.

Despite stepped-up efforts by state and federal governments, utilities and private groups to help people avoid shut-offs this winter, some worry the problem will only get worse in the coming months, particularly with the downturn on Wall Street.

"I just didn't have the money to pay," said Marie Williams, a single mother raising four daughters in Cohoes, N.Y., a former mill city on the Hudson River. "Rent had to be paid, and food for the girls."

Williams' power was cut off this summer for about a week, forcing her girls to do homework by candlelight. She became one of more than 230,000 residential customers of New York's 10 major utilities to have their service shut off for nonpayment through August of this year.

At the same time, people who rely on heating oil instead of gas or electricity to warm their homes are pleading for relief from high fuel prices.

Southern California Edison Co., with 4.5 million residential electric customers, reported residential terminations were up 10 percent through August of this year to 228,000; Westar Energy Inc. of Topeka, Kan., said it saw a 19.5 percent increase in residential shut-offs over the same period. Tampa Electric Co. reported a 19 percent climb in disconnect orders through June for residential and commercial customers.

Michigan regulators reported a 7 percent increase in residential natural gas shut-offs through June and a 39 percent rise in residential electricity terminations.

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

## State jobless funds are running dry

By Stephen C. Fehr

[www.stateline.org](http://www.stateline.org)

Laid off from your job in Tennessee? Good luck getting unemployment checks right away. So many people have been calling the state lately to apply for benefits that callers often can't get through. "We're sorry. We're unable to take your call at the present time due to extremely high call volume," says a recording.

In North Carolina, where more people are out of jobs than ever, state employees are working overtime and on weekends to reduce a backlog of requests to verify unemployment benefits that has been as high as 17,000, compared to only a few cases a day a year ago.

Michigan, which has the nation's highest unemployment rate at 8.9 percent has a different problem. There isn't enough money in its unemployment insurance fund to cover claims, so the state has been forced to borrow from the federal government to pay jobless benefits.

The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits is at the highest levels since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Weekly claims have exceeded 400,000 for 11 weeks, compared to 324,000 a year ago, a level that economists say indicates a recession. The rise in joblessness is draining revenue from state treasuries and straining the governments' ability to pay for and deliver unemployment benefits in a timely way.

Unemployment insurance trust funds are in danger of insolvency in California, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, South Carolina and Wisconsin. According to the National Employment Law Project, a policy group based in New York that advocates on behalf of the unemployed, 11 additional states are facing financial challenges paying their jobless benefits.

"I'm very concerned about the trust fund situation," said Andrew Stettner, deputy director of the advocacy group. "This isn't going to be a short and sweet (economic) downturn."

States typically collect payroll taxes from employers to pay for jobless claims; lawmakers set the tax rates, the maximum amount of the unemployment checks and the duration of benefits. Many states have boosted the amount of benefit payments but have not increased payroll taxes to keep up, which creates a gap in the trust funds. State benefits generally last up to 26 weeks; some



states qualify for up to an additional 13 weeks from the federal government if a state is experiencing high unemployment.

In California, where the jobless rate of 7.3 percent is the highest in 12 years, analysts say the unemployment fund could be as much as \$1.6 billion in the red by the end of next year, especially if the jobless rate keeps going up.

“Our forecast for California has unemployment continuing to rise before it starts falling,” said Jerry Nickelsburg, a UCLA economist.

Unless lawmakers raise taxes or cut benefits, the shortfall will keep rising and the state will have to borrow money from the federal government for the first time since the 2001 recession. Separately, California officials said Oct. 2 they may have to borrow federal money by the end of the month to pay their bills because the tightening credit market has made it hard for the state to borrow from its traditional lenders.

South Carolina has only enough money in its unemployment fund to pay benefits through the middle of January. The state has been hit by a wave of layoffs in manufacturing and construction. Wisconsin lawmakers and Gov. Jim Doyle raised unemployment taxes in March but that may not be enough to offset the rise in the jobless rate, which is 5.1 percent. The jobless rate had already been rising in New York and New Jersey before the meltdown last month on Wall Street, which will add thousands of workers to the benefits roll.

Stettner said many states have not prepared for the recession by building up their trust fund reserves. Instead, he said, many states tend to cut payroll taxes when times are good. The crunch from the recession will really hit states’ jobless funds in the first three months of 2009 when tax revenues are traditionally slow, Stettner said.

“States need to get in front of it” before the spring, he said. “This is the time to do it.”

Despite Congress’ rescue of the financial system, economists say that unemployment will continue to go up while consumer spending and tax revenue decline. Most analysts predict the recession will last a year or two, continuing a cycle of budget cutting by governors and state legislatures that began this year.

“I can’t see the bailout short-circuiting processes that were already underway,” said Michael Bordo, a Rutgers University economist. “To the extent we’re already going into a recession, unemployment will probably keep rising.”

Until it’s easier for businesses, governments and consumers to borrow the money they need to meet payrolls, pay bills and buy houses and cars, economists say, companies will continue laying off workers. They will not only file for unemployment checks; some will be forced to seek Medicaid benefits, the federal-state health insurance program for low-income Americans that is already pinching state treasuries.

No region has been spared, though some energy and agriculture states have weathered the downturn easier than others. Out of 22 states that gained jobs since December, unemployment has risen in all but Oklahoma and West Virginia, according to an analysis by the Economic Policy Institute. In Texas, which gained more jobs than any other states since December, unemployment jumped from 4.2 percent to 5 percent.